



Appendix 7: Indigenous community consultation

1.1 Introduction

Indigenous community engagement was a particular theme where various options were trialled as a pilot for both the *Border Ranges Rainforest Biodiversity Management Plan* (DECCW 2010) and this Plan. As the areas addressed by these two plans overlap, it was advantageous to combine the Indigenous community engagement process. The aim was to identify practical options for engagement of Indigenous communities in biodiversity conservation and threatened species recovery.

The outcomes from the successful delivery of these engagement options aimed to be:

- An improved understanding of how Indigenous interests in biodiversity can be integrated across the landscape.
- An enhanced community capacity to develop and implement biodiversity management on their lands covering a range of issues (e.g. threatened entities, cultural and biodiversity assets, weeds, fire, riparian health).
- An increase in successful community bids for biodiversity conservation and management funding.
- An increased level of involvement by, and understanding in, Indigenous communities of biodiversity conservation and management.
- An increase in the employment opportunities for Indigenous people on their community-held lands and across the broader landscape.
- An increase in the understanding of Indigenous school children of how their cultural knowledge connects with biodiversity management across the landscape and increased engagement in biodiversity conservation.
- A more culturally comprehensive approach to managing biodiversity across the broader landscape.
- Improved health or conservation status of biodiversity or threatened entities across Indigenous-owned lands.

1.2 Approach

Past approaches of undertaking a 'consultation process' over large areas have not proven to be effective due to the large number of communities, the geographic spread of the project area, the time and resource constraints faced by communities and their organisations, and the fact that many community groups suffer 'consultation fatigue'. Indigenous communities are constantly being consulted and requested to provide input to a range of programs—usually without financial incentive or support. In addition, Indigenous communities typically have a history of being consulted only on cultural heritage issues and not, for the most part, on biodiversity issues. Accordingly, communities have generally not developed the capacity to engage on broad biodiversity-focussed consultation.

A forum to discuss Indigenous engagement in threatened species recovery was held by the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water NSW (DECCW) in northern NSW in 2004. The principle outcomes from that forum were that Indigenous communities:

- generally felt they were unable to access, or were often unsuccessful accessing, natural resource management and biodiversity funding
- wanted to be engaged in protecting landscapes and ecological communities, not just single species
- sought long-term employment opportunities in the sector



- required recognition that culture and biodiversity are integrally linked and connected
- wanted recognition of their knowledge as a valuable contribution to the better protection and management of biodiversity
- wanted recognition that they have cultural and spiritual responsibility for caring for their Country.

Previous experience in engaging with Indigenous communities on biodiversity and threatened species recovery indicated that exploring practical mechanisms was more likely to be effective (e.g. Baker et al. 1993; Baker 1996, 2004; Nesbitt et al. 2001; Robinson et al. 2003; English & Baker 2003; Hofmeyer & McDermott 2006). If communities can be engaged at a local, practical level then this would lead to opportunities to exchange information on broader biodiversity issues.

To assist in designing this approach, an Indigenous organisation (Eastern Yugambeh Ltd) was engaged by DECCW to develop a scoping document. The document identified Indigenous groups in the Region, determined their interest in biodiversity management, and assessed capacity and constraints to their being involved in biodiversity projects.

The resulting *Indigenous Engagement Strategy* (Eastern Yugambeh Ltd 2006) provided guidance for establishing partnerships between Aboriginal organisations, knowledge holders' groups and government agencies. The Strategy identified a number of key points to assist with engaging Indigenous communities in biodiversity conservation. These were:

- identify an activity that engages the community
- identify organisations with an interest in participation
- identify the aspects of interest of those organisations in that project
- identify capacity of each interested organisation to facilitate the involvement of their members
- structure the activity or target to ensure that it meets the needs of the government agencies, the Indigenous community and other stakeholders.

Based on these key points, it was decided to design a 'toolkit' that provided a range of opportunities to involve Indigenous groups in biodiversity planning and management. The key to the toolkit was recognising that integrating protection and enhancement of culture and biodiversity creates opportunities for Indigenous education, training and employment; and increases the recognition and integration of Indigenous knowledge of Country into biodiversity management. The basic principles that were adopted for developing the toolkit were:

- there needed to be practical engagement that offered benefits to the community, particularly in regard to employment opportunities and education
- recognition that the desire to be engaged needs to come from the communities, and the agency's task is to provide the tools and support for that engagement
- recognition that capacity building both within and outside the Indigenous organisations and government biodiversity agencies is crucial to making substantial gains in these areas
- that culture and biodiversity are integrally connected and management should be based on shared knowledge and information
- that strong partnerships between Indigenous groups, job network and training providers, biodiversity management agencies and natural resource management funding bodies is required for successful ongoing engagement.



1.3 Development of the toolkit

Due to the large geographical area and wide range of community-based organisations in the Region, and the varying levels of capacity and interest, it was decided to start with one community which had previously indicated interest. The aim was to develop some concepts and then extend those concepts out to other communities as interest was generated. The approach to developing the toolkit was iterative and adaptive and is ongoing. A range of options to trial were identified, including:

- Contracting Indigenous community groups to interview their Elders and knowledge-holders in order to collect knowledge and oral histories regarding particular threatened species, groups of species, or a particular locality.
- Assisting Indigenous community groups to prepare property management plans for community owned lands. These plans identify biodiversity and cultural assets, threats and management requirements.
- Supporting communities to undertake fauna, flora and ethno-ecology surveys.
- Engaging communities in the preparation of Hotspots Fire planning on community-owned land, and training of community members as planning facilitators.
- Supporting communities wanting to engage in individual species management programs in targeted areas.
- Developing targeted Indigenous environmental education programs for school children and their communities.
- Working with communities to undertake cultural landscape mapping.
- Supporting language and knowledge programs and cultural return through creating and providing knowledge resources to communities.
- Assisting communities to develop ecotourism material to support business opportunities on community-owned land.
- Supporting Indigenous green team initiatives and expanding opportunities for engaging in a broad range of natural resource management and biodiversity management areas (currently in development).

Some examples, or case studies, of these various approaches are provided below.

1.3.1 Community reporting on threatened species

This process was trialled prior to the Northern Rivers Plan process, and was undertaken on very limited resources. Community self-consultation involved resourcing the community group to employ members of their own community to undertake oral history and ethno-ecological interviews with Elders and knowledge-holders and to prepare a report relating to knowledge and management issues for species or groups of species. For example, the Ngulingah Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) prepared a report on the cultural significance of Davidson's Plum, Smooth Davidsonia and Small-leaved Tamarind (Ngulingah LALC 2007). Other successful projects included the endangered Coastal Emu Population (e.g. Tomkins 2003) and management of the grassy headlands supporting *Zieria prostrata* (Tomkins & Murphy 2004). A small number of other projects were commenced but not completed.

A range of outcomes were delivered, based on capacity of the organisations to undertake the projects and available knowledge within the community. Whilst communities were keen to undertake these projects, there was little or no opportunity for ongoing engagement once the project was finished due to lack of resourcing and a clear pathway for future engagement.



1.3.2 Biodiversity restoration and management plans

The preparation and implementation of biodiversity restoration and management plans for community-held lands is a way of integrating Indigenous interests with biodiversity management. The process is simple and easy to deliver. The key steps are:

- Engage a local biodiversity contractor, preferably one with previous community connections, to work with community members on the preparation of the plan.
- Document biodiversity and cultural assets, threats and identify management zones.
- Prioritise and cost management recommendations.
- Assist community to prepare funding bids for implementation projects.

A biodiversity contractor with property planning expertise and connections to the community was engaged to work with community members on preparing one property plan for Casino Boolangle LALC as a pilot. The plan identified the biodiversity and cultural assets of the property, threats to those assets, management recommendations and cost estimates (Morrison 2007b). The contractor then assisted the community to access natural resource management funding to implement the plan and has continued to provide on-ground support through the implementation process.

Following the success of this trial, plans were prepared for another three Casino Boolangle Land Council properties (Morrison 2007c, 2007e, 2007f) and one was prepared on behalf of the Jubullum Aboriginal Community for the Jubullum Flat Camp Aboriginal Area (Morrison 2007d). This area already had a cultural management plan for the Aboriginal Place, but it didn't include the biodiversity component. Additionally, the consultant undertook preliminary flora and fauna assessment and consultation with the Jubal community on their 1000 ha property near Tabulam. Funding for the preparation of the plans was provided through the Natural Heritage Trust, the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, DECCW and the Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA). Jali LALC prepared a plan (Edwards 2008) which was funded through the Biobanking LandAlive program.

The participating communities have since been successful in accessing increased natural resource management and biodiversity funding due to the biodiversity management and restoration plans and the community engagement and learning that occurred during the preparation of the plans.

A biodiversity management and restoration plan was prepared for the Ngulingah LALC (Morrison 2007a) and the plan was then used as the basis for applying for Working for Country funding. The funding application was successful and will support the employment of up to seven community members and a coordinator over five years.

The Wollumbin Consultative Group (Knowledge Holders of the Tweed Caldera) are also participating in development of a plan to assist them in developing alternative interpretive ecotourism options within Wollumbin National Park, and to identify on-ground biodiversity management activities that the community can engage in within the Park. Parks and Wildlife Group supported the project and are working collaboratively with the contractor and the community.

The Northern Rivers CMA is currently funding plans to be prepared for properties owned by Bogal LALC and negotiations with other communities are ongoing, with funding from the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative in the Border Ranges area.

1.3.3 Fauna surveys and monitoring

The Glenn Innes LALC was interested in training for their community and high school children in Koala survey and monitoring. The Koala is a culturally significant species for the community and is present on two Glenn Innes LALC properties. A survey and monitoring program was delivered to the Land Council, elders and school children over two days. The LALC and DECCW Aboriginal Heritage Northern Region are undertaking an ongoing monitoring program. Following on from this initial work, two bird surveys of the properties have been conducted by DECCW staff to contribute to the



information resource for the community. The community is now considering developing a proposal for the properties to potentially become an Indigenous protected area.

1.3.4 Hotspots Fire Project

The Nature Conservation Council Hotspots Fire Project aims to:

- improve the management of fire as a tool for conserving biodiversity in NSW on community-owned land
- improve landholders' understanding and knowledge of the role of fire and ability to manage fire for healthy landscapes
- improve the capacity of communities to work together to manage fire.

The majority of the biodiversity management and restoration plans identified the lack of fire management as the primary threat to biodiversity and cultural values on the properties. Most properties had a long history of cattle grazing prior to their change to Indigenous ownership over the past 5 to 10 years. Previous management had maintained low fuel loads which had protected habitat features such as large hollow trees and coarse ground litter as well as Aboriginal scar trees. The development of rank grasses and extensive *Lantana camara* in the absence of grazing pose an obvious and significant threat to these values.

Fire was one of the management issues that was clearly identified from the initial Koala survey on the Glenn Innes properties. The Hotspots fire project developed a fire management strategy for the two properties in collaboration with the community. One of the Elders has been undertaking fire-stick farming in some areas on the properties and his experience was incorporated into the development of the fire management strategy.

The Hotspot trainers undertook a number of workshops with Indigenous communities from Casino, Tabulam and Jubal areas to assist the communities to develop fire management strategies for their properties and to train Indigenous facilitators. Further workshops are planned to assist these communities in preparing and implementing fire plans for their properties.

These fire plans complement the property biodiversity restoration and management plans by providing detailed advice on how to protect and manage biodiversity and cultural assets through fire management. The Hotspots Fire Project has helped to link the Indigenous groups with neighbouring property owners, State government agencies such as DECCW Parks and Wildlife Group, Forests NSW and the Rural Fire Service. It has also provided an understanding of legislation and procedures that are required prior to implementing appropriate hazard reduction activities.

1.3.5 Individual species management programs in targeted areas

The Booroongen Djugun Aboriginal Corporation sought support to undertake protection and management of a culturally significant population of the endangered Swamp Orchid *Phaius australis*.

The project is an Aboriginal Natural Resource partnership between the Corporation and DECCW to undertake rehabilitation works in the habitat of the Swamp Orchid near Kempsey and to secure an ex situ collection on a secure off-site location to ensure the preservation of the population genetics. The site is relatively exposed and subject to a number of threats, including potential illegal collection. The project will contribute to the conservation of the orchid and at least two endangered ecological communities (swamp sclerophyll forest and Swamp Oak forest) through habitat rehabilitation.

1.3.6 Indigenous environmental education programs

This project is being supported by the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative and involves scoping the potential role for a 'Cultural Connections Kit' (an education support kit about connecting biodiversity and Indigenous culture). The Kit aims to promote Indigenous engagement with connectivity conservation through education.



The pilot Cultural Connections Kit will be an interactive CD-ROM providing schools with localised education resources about Indigenous culture and the relationships to native plants and animals, associated habitats, ecosystems and threatened species in their area. It is intended that the focus of the first pilot will be based on the first biodiversity restoration and management plan prepared as part of this trial, subject to final negotiations with the LALC, and would be relevant to Bandjalang language holders.

Once the first CD-ROM has been designed, opportunities will arise for adapting the CD-ROM for other Indigenous communities. The kit builds on two other Connect Kids kits that have been recently developed for the Coffs Harbour area and more broadly for particular habitats within the Northern Rivers CMA.

Community Elders and the local schools are being consulted and involved in the preparation of the kit and the kit will provide a modern platform to assist community Elders engage with students. Elders will be able to assist in undertaking field-based activities derived from the kit.

The focus of the Cultural Connections Kit will be on the biodiversity values of the community, cultural significance of natural values, focus species selected by the community, and recovery actions that can be implemented by school kids. The biodiversity restoration and management plans provide information to support preparation of the education kit.

1.3.7 Indigenous ecotourism ventures

This project builds upon the Cultural Connections Kit and biodiversity restoration and management plans. It seeks to develop 'Connection Walks' on Indigenous-owned land to enhance the value of educational resources, and to develop tourism and education business enterprises. This project is supported by the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative.

Connection Walks utilise the biodiversity restoration and management plan outputs for managing biodiversity and habitat connectivity at the property level. It also uses the Cultural Connection Education Kit material to provide interpretive material for the Connection Walks. It is intended that combining these three products will provide Indigenous communities with a strong platform on which to access natural resource management, education and tourism funding for implementation on their lands.

The objective of this project is to work with the Elders and community to undertake site assessment and planning for a Connection Walk that highlights the properties' cultural and natural values such as species, habitat, connectivity, threats and examples of site restoration or rehabilitation on Indigenous community-held lands. This will be enhanced and supported by the Cultural Connections Education Kit for primary schools.

This project is currently being piloted with the Casino Boolangle and Wollumbin Consultative Group (Knowledge Holders of the Tweed Caldera).

1.3.8 Working with communities to undertake cultural landscape mapping

A project to explore opportunities for cultural landscape mapping was undertaken in Bandjalang Country (Hofmeyer & McDermott 2006). The project aimed to assist in the understanding and protection of the cultural landscape of the Bandjalang people. DECCW officers worked with Bandjalang Elders to map their cultural landscape within ten DECCW reserves in the Coraki area. Biodiversity, including threatened species and natural resources, were recorded as a component of the cultural landscape, and management of these assets was considered as part of the management of the cultural landscape.

Another mapping project explored the options for using the DECCW Aboriginal Heritage Decision Support Tool to inform strategic planning by using cultural features mapping and combining those



outputs with biodiversity forecasting tool outputs for the *Border Ranges Rainforest Biodiversity Management Plan* (DECCW 2010).

Within the NSW Border Ranges Planning Area, 37 cultural heritage sites were identified and all were located within areas identified as being of high biodiversity priority. The heritage sites were mostly artefact scatters, but also included two ceremony and dreaming sites, three bora rings, an art site and eight middens.

This combination of cultural and biodiversity information allows for more integrated prioritisation and planning. In particular, any biodiversity conservation and repair works in the vicinity of these sites would need to ensure that the appropriate Indigenous community be consulted and that heritage sites are not adversely affected by the conservation works.

1.3.9 Supporting language and knowledge programs, and cultural return

Cultural return project

This project is developing fauna and flora species information brochures for Indigenous communities based on retrieved archival material on cultural use of biodiversity resources. The project is being supported by the LandAlive project as part of its oral history program.

Connecting biodiversity conservation projects with language and oral history projects

The team has endeavoured to connect projects to develop biodiversity restoration and management plans, education and ecotourism material with other existing language and oral history projects. For example, the Jubullum Flat Camp Aboriginal Place includes an early (post European) Indigenous burial ground and has strong spiritual connection with a number of Aboriginal groups around and beyond the Tabulam area.

The on-site community consultation for the biodiversity restoration and management plan included members of the Jubullum, Jubal, Bonalbo and Casino Boolangle Indigenous communities. As well as discussion of the biodiversity plan, the event provided an opportunity for each of the groups to discuss projects they were currently involved with, including biodiversity planning at the Casino and Jubal properties and bush tucker projects being undertaken at Jubal Flat Camp and by the Bonalbo Aboriginal Corporation. The Bonalbo group was also undertaking a 'Maintaining Indigenous Language' project involving Uncle Harry Walker, the key custodian for Flat Camp. The local Landcare group and flora and fauna experts were also involved in discussions regarding the various projects.

Uncle Harry expressed a strong desire to revive the Indigenous culture through keeping the language alive, restoring the environment to its past abundance, and developing the site as a cultural learning place for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people. This vision was shared by all those who were present at the meeting. There was a strong agreement that working with the young people to re-establish ties with the land was fundamental to the revival of their culture. Each of the groups appeared to acknowledge the importance of revival of traditional language in linking their people with the landscape. Uncle Harry talked about the history of the site and his people and described landscape features and some of the plants and animals around the site using traditional language which was utilized in the Bonalbo groups Maintaining Indigenous Language project. Uncle Harry will be involved in the development of the Cultural Connections Kit.

The desire of the Elders of Jubullum to 'bring back the bush' to the Flat Camp Site for cultural learning purposes demonstrates the fundamental linkage between biodiversity and cultural heritage conservation, and that environmental restoration can fulfil common outcomes. The Flat Camp Biodiversity Restoration and Management Plan is fully aligned with these objectives.



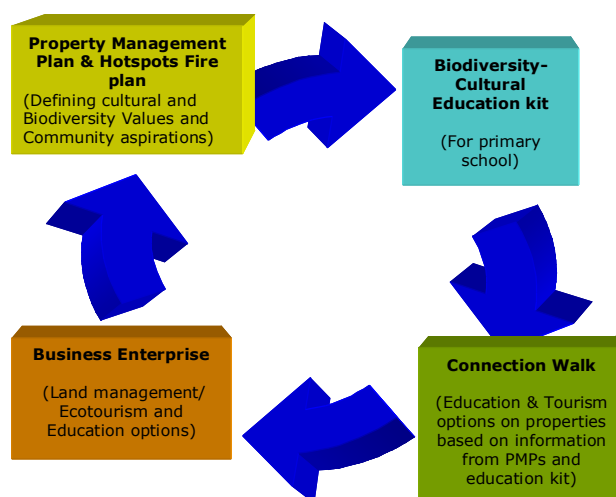
Arrangements were made with the local Landcare group members to undertake volunteer work with Uncle Harry at the site and donate suitable trees for planting at Flat Camp. A number of cultural events have since occurred involving Uncle Harry and the Landcare group at Flat Camp and other locations around the Tabulam area.

1.4 Discussion

The Indigenous engagement component has been successful in many areas and is providing communities with opportunities to engage in cultural and biodiversity management across a number of areas. Those engaged in the project have learnt a great deal and, despite funding for this project being exhausted, the project continues to develop and adapt where new opportunities arise.

The components that have contributed to the success of the project include:

- Strong partnerships across the government and non-government sector to provide resourcing and support for the projects.
- Collaboration between the DECCW Biodiversity Conservation Section and Culture and Heritage Division.
- Full-time engagement of an Indigenous project coordinator working with the biodiversity team to oversee the project and undertake ongoing liaison with communities.
- Contractors with high levels of personal dedication, existing good connections with Indigenous communities and biodiversity networks.
- Starting with a community that had an identified interest in participating.
- Engaging with communities that sought involvement in the project.
- Letting the projects expand through community feedback, that is, building on recommendations of other participating communities rather than soliciting engagement.
- Designing products that were of interest and use to the communities.
- Flexibility in the design and implementation of products and developing new ones as opportunities arose.
- Building a range of products that interconnect and build on each other for a community, as illustrated.



- Providing products that support a community in seeking and maximising funding and employment opportunities.



1.5 Next Steps

There is ongoing Indigenous community interest in this program being continued and expanded. To continue to build on the successes of the current program it is recommended that:

- The current program is supported with funding to allow it to continue and expand.
- Funding is made available to support additional Indigenous communities to develop biodiversity management and restoration plans and fire management plans.
- Greater and easier access to opportunities for long-term funding for training and employment of communities members in biodiversity management, education and tourism on their community owned lands.
- As required, communities are assisted to build capacity to manage biodiversity projects and associated employment.
- Partnerships are encouraged between Indigenous communities and employment and training networks to provide mentoring and support for communities engaged in establishing biodiversity management and tourism enterprises.
- Capacity is increased within government agencies to work effectively across disciplines and engage with Indigenous communities.
- Biodiversity management agencies should provide ongoing support for communities seeking funding, and facilitate opportunities for communities to engage in biodiversity-related programs.
- Partners should maintain an open and adaptive approach to engaging communities in biodiversity and threatened species conservation and management.



Acronyms

CMA	Catchment management authority
DECCW	Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water NSW
ha	hectare
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council

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